

## EDITOR'S NOTE

The quarter just gone by was dominated by the events in Ladakh amidst the continuing stand-off since early May. Ever since June 15, when the clash at the Galwan Valley took place, in a roller-coaster change of stance at the diplomatic level, the Chinese were at their best by not showing their true hand while waxing eloquent about the need to calm tempers at the tactical level and maintain peace and tranquillity along the LAC.

A memorial has since been built on the Darbuk-Shyok-DBO (DSDBO) Road (at Km 120 stone) to commemorate the supreme sacrifice of the twenty bravehearts—the Gallants of Galwan—who evicted the PLA soldiers and destroyed the observation post that the PLA had built on Indian soil near the Y-junction of the Galwan river.

On September 29, in a sudden, unilateral move, China declared the 1959 claim line as its perception of the Line of Actual Control. Rejecting the abrupt declaration, India responded that the cartographic claim that was made by then Chinese Premier Chou En-lai to then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru through a letter on November 7, 1959, had been rejected even then by the Indian prime minister as soon as the absurd claim was made. On September 30, 2020, they were also reminded that China was already in illegal possession of 33,000 sq km of territory in Aksai Chin, besides the 5,180 sq km of territory in the Shaksgam Valley that was illegally ceded to it by Pakistan in 1963. The Chinese side was further asked to refrain from advancing an “untenable” interpretation of the de facto border. On September 30, 2020, during the diplomatic level talks at the 19th round of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on India-China border affairs, both sides agreed to continue early actions to ensure peace and tranquillity along the border, with the Chinese side also stating that both sides should “take practical measures

to promote further de-escalation and cooling of the border situation and *avoid any action that could complicate the situation* (emphasis added)".

It appears that the Chinese have been particularly peeved at the pre-emptive action taken by the Indian Army in occupying key positions—while being on the Indian side of the LAC on the south bank of the Pangong Tso—that overlook Chinese positions. Hence, the above inclusion in the Chinese statement. Calling it another 'stunt' by the Indian Army, the Chinese media is awash with rhetoric that this action by India would see a befitting reply by the Chinese who would inflict another 'new defeat' on the Indian Army in the Pangong lake region.

The two sides remain locked in eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation while the diplomatic parleys continue.

Pakistan, not the one to sit idly by while India and China face-off at the LAC, has been stoking the POK/GB fire and following its favourite pastime: that of finding new ways of needling India. This time it was through a declaration of intent to elevate the status of Gilgit-Baltistan to a 'full-fledged Province'. It appears that Pakistan has got so carried away on the need to show solidarity to 'Big Brother China' that it is willing to risk international opprobrium if it goes ahead and declares the region—which is still a disputed region between India and Pakistan—as its Fifth Province. The biggest advantage would accrue to China by such a declaration as it would, de facto, 'clear the decks' for the CPEC project to roll on 'officially', besides permitting Chinese businessmen to buy land in GB. But are the Chinese really that naïve not to see the dangers that lie in store for them before investing large sums of money in areas that are not the sovereign territory of Pakistan—not even contained in Article 1 of the Pakistani Constitution? Also, the final status of the erstwhile State of J&K is not yet decided. Of course, the shrewd Chinese mind has already found that there is more than one way to skin a cat. In this case, while proposing the Flagship project of its BRI, the Chinese were aware that the CPEC would pass through GB—a disputed territory. It will be recalled that once India showed its unwillingness to be a part of China's One Belt One Road initiative—on the grounds that the CPEC violated India's sovereignty—China was looking for a way to placate India. Accordingly, it conveyed to

India the terms contained in Article 6 of the Agreement it had signed with Pakistan in 1963 (after Pakistan had illegally ceded the Shaksgam Valley to China—a total of 5,180 sq km) that clearly mentions that when India and Pakistan settle the Kashmir dispute, *the sovereign authority concerned would reopen negotiations with the government of the People's Republic of China, on the boundary as described in Article 2 of the present agreement, so as to sign a formal Boundary Treaty to replace the present agreement.* The Chinese proclivity of taking a 'long-term view' of matters that could jeopardise its national interests in future, appears to be vindicated when one sees the ongoing developments post the abrogation of Article 370.

There is absolutely no harm in taking a long-term view of things and being pragmatic, especially when you are about to sink a sizeable amount of your national wealth into a project that could go horribly wrong. If China is going ahead with the CPEC for meeting its 'Connectivity requirements'—an alternate supply route that could resolve its Malacca Dilemma—is India not entitled to resolve *its* connectivity problems by reaching out to the Central Asian Republics via the Wakhan Corridor? Should India, then, not look at *its* strategic interests that are inextricably linked to the very same region? That the access to CAR lies in an area under Pakistan's wrongful occupation is an internal matter of India; how that can be resolved should be a bilateral issue between the countries involved. A third nation—that is best seen as an 'opportunist' and one that has literally 'arm-twisted' Pakistan into ceding to it a critical portion of the Shaksgam Valley, and now plans to construct a road through this territory, and onwards through GB, to further its national interests—has absolutely no *locus standi* in this issue.

The geostrategic position that GB enjoys—at the gateway that opens to West Asia—is an advantage that China would never want to squander away. Putting pressure on Pakistan to legitimise its construction of the CPEC is high on the agenda of Xi Jinping. China also feels threatened by the fact that the strategic Karakoram Pass is barely 15 km from the Indian post at DBO, and which has since been connected by the DSDBO road built by India's Border Roads Organisation. Hence, the continued stand-off with India at the LAC since April—in a staring contest to see who blinks first.

The action taken by the Indian military to forestall any action by the Chinese in the Ladakh and Arunachal sectors includes positioning of Akash SAMs, Brahmos surface-to-surface cruise missiles (not to forget that these can also be launched from the Su-30 MKI), the T-72/T-90 Main Battle Tanks, BMP-2 Infantry Combat Vehicles, and a host of other subsonic cruise missiles, shoulder fired SAMs, radars, and other elements of the army and the air force crucial to war-fighting. While this build-up has taken place to send a strong message to the other side, one must not forget the Chinese proclivity to 'go around obstacles', much like water does while flowing downstream and encounters a boulder in its path. This Sun Tzu dictum has been followed by the Chinese in more battles than one. Providing adequate defence-in-depth with a tiered/layered defence to challenge the adversary, should he attempt to outflank areas where defences appear to be strong, would be the most appropriate method to counter such designs of the enemy.

Another disturbing fact that has emerged of late is the mining activity that is being carried out in the border town of Lhunzhe opposite the Arunachal sector. The town has been in the throes of a 'gold rush' due to rich finds of the yellow metal, silver and other minerals—estimated to be worth more than US\$ 60 billion. The mining activity in the region—which is extremely close to the border—has the potential to become a military flashpoint in the future. With Xi Jinping personally imploring Han Chinese to settle in the area 'and grow roots', the intentions of the Chinese in that region do not inspire confidence. It will be recalled that one of the reasons for the withdrawal of the PLA from the areas close to Missamari (near the foothills close to Tezpur) in Assam—to which they had advanced during the 1962 conflict—was the lack of local support to withstand the long winter period that lay ahead that would have cut off their supply routes. With more Han Chinese settling in the border areas—like the border town of Lhunzhe—Xi hopes to overcome this shortcoming in the future.

And finally, another typical Chinese trait that has surfaced post the creation of the PRC is the harking back to the 'Century of Humiliation' by its leadership to evoke nationalism in times of crisis, or to further a geopolitical/geostrategic agenda. It has been seen in the actions by the Chinese in the SCS where they have given the rules-based world order (UNCLOS-82) a go-by

and implanted domestic laws of China to justify their actions at building military infrastructure on reefs after dredging and 'reclaiming' the area from the sea. A weak reference to the Century of Humiliation 'in modern times' was attempted by them after the Chinese Embassy was bombed in Belgrade—by mistake—by US aircraft during the Kosovo conflict. Given the Chinese propensity to recall such incidents to raise national sentiment—and justify any action thereof—it would be advisable to keep in mind the humiliation suffered by the PLA at Walong during the 1962 conflict. This was the only sector in which the Indian Army counterattacked the PLA, and where the PLA suffered huge casualties. Could the PLA, then, be thinking of some action to 'avenge' the bloody nose they got at the hands of the valiant Indian Army at the Battle of Walong?

In this issue, we also pay homage to our founder Director, late Air Cmde Jasjit Singh. Usually, CAPS conducts the annual Jasjit Singh Memorial Lecture at India Habitat Centre in July; the same had to be cancelled this year due to the Covid-19 situation.

Born on July 8, 1934, he joined the IAF in 1956 and was commissioned into the Fighter stream. During his extremely eventful and successful career in the IAF—that also saw him participating in the 1971 Indo-Pak conflict where he earned a Vir Chakra—he was appointed Deputy Director, IDSA in 1985. This was a first for a serving military officer, and the beginning of an even more rewarding second career for Jasjit Sir, as he went on to become one of the foremost strategic thinkers and military strategists that the nation has ever produced. After taking over the reins of IDSA from Shri K. Subrahmanyam in 1987, he served as its longest serving Director—for 14 years!

Thereafter, he set up CAPS under a private, non-profit trust registered in New Delhi called the Forum for National Security Studies. From its humble beginnings in a DDA flat to its present location in Subroto Park, was a journey that was full of hard work and the unflinching commitment to see how best CAPS could be an instrument to provide professional military education to the IAF and to help it understand the global trends in air power transformation. National security remained the underlying *mantra* behind all his endeavours at CAPS that soon began to grow in stature under his dynamic and visionary leadership. In a cruel twist

of fate, he succumbed to a bronchial infection and breathed his last on August 4, 2013.

Dr. Manpreet Sethi, Distinguished Fellow at CAPS, and one of the many scholars groomed by Jasjit Sir, pays a special tribute to him in an article that appears in this issue. It is titled "Jasjit Singh: The Nuclear Strategist with the Red Turban". I would not like to steal her thunder any further, knowing how emotionally attached she—and the other scholars at CAPS—were to Jasjit Sir, not the least for his professional acumen, but also for his humaneness.

Finally, a word of caution.

China has been over-hyped in recent times. There have been so many Webinars—forced by the outbreak of the Wuhan virus—that have dealt with 'China's (not-so) peaceful rise', that it has become a self-defeating exercise, to say the least. A common thread in most such webinars that deal with the security threat posed by China is that most of the new technologies that China boasts about—Quantum communications, AI, Hypersonic Glide Vehicle (DF-17), and others—have never been tested in an operational environment. Their interplay and integration with other systems to produce the desired effects is at best a work in progress as many strategic experts around the world suggest. To make the enemy ten feet tall would, therefore, be an exercise in self-deterrence, and needs to be studiously avoided. At the same time, making good one's critical voids in military equipment, gearing up for a long haul, and staying prepared for a worst-case scenario, and most importantly, having faith in your capabilities and your level of training, would be the most pragmatic exercise for the Indian military establishment in the current situation.

Happy reading!

STAY SAFE STAY HEALTHY STAY CHEERFUL

